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GREAT PORTRAITS

Children

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KING OF ROME

LAWRENCE

BEAUX-ARTS GALLERY, PARIS

GREAT PORTRAITS

Children

By Philip L. Hale

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STRAWBERRY GIRL

REYNOLDS

HERTFORD HOUSE, LONDON

GREAT PORTRAITS:
Children

PORTRAITS of children were not so common as those of men and women. And one wonders at this when one reflects that nowadays fond mothers are constantly taking their children to the photographer. Indeed, it would seem in this time that children were photographed much more than their elders. But this is the era of children. In the olden days parents, no doubt, loved their children, but if any money were to be spent on portraits it was the father and mother who were painted first — later, it may be, the child. In royal families especially there was a reason for this; for portraits were painted largely as gifts to other sovereigns, or great lords, or devoted courtiers. The king had his portrait painted often, almost, as one might say, as a matter of business. Sometimes a little prince was painted, but merely for love of the child. And for the same reason, outside of the portraits of royal children, few portraits of children have come down to us. So it was with the nobility, and so, too, with the commoners — even more so.

Still, practically every great painter has tried his hand at painting children at least once or twice, and most of them have produced excellent work; only a man may turn out a very respectable portrait of a child and yet not be a true painter of children. To do that well there is needed a certain insight into child character. Not that a child has a very subtle or complicated character, but it is a character all the same and one that can be divined only by sympathy.

Constable once said that "to a man who approached Nature in an arrogant spirit her choicest beauties remained forever veiled." One might say this particularly about children. We feel instinctively that only those who love children can paint them.

Each great painter of children has had his own manner. Bronzino was hard and cold in his style, yet no man ever studied the subtlest curves of a child face more minutely and patiently than he. Velasquez's children are delightful; but there is in them, as in all his portraits, a sense of aloofness, as if the artist recorded all the beautiful aspects of the apparition with a mind apt for insight, but perhaps not very sympathetic. Reynolds's children are often delightful. One likes to think of the chill old bachelor pleasing himself by recording their infantile charm. Madame Vigée Lebrun is the only mother, of the older artists, who has painted her

child, and she is delightful, full of demure French charm. Yet there is little sense of passionate mother-love. Indeed, Carrière's pictures of mothers fervently bussing their children suggest more of this famous mother-love than does anything of Lebrun's.

One of the charming and pathetic things about these mother pictures which one notices in life, as well as in Carrière's and Melcher's pictures, is that the child is cold and indifferent to his mother's passion. One recalls the story of a child saying to her mother, whose face was crushed against the childish cheek, "What are you smelling me for? I is n't a flower."

But the child does have the charm of a flower, and it is by its freshness and fragrance that it attracts and enthrals not only mothers, but every one else. Emerson points out in his essay on 'Self-Reliance' that a baby dominates a household because it is the only one that knows definitely just what it wants and insists on getting it. But this self-reliance would hardly avail if it were not for the affection the child's helplessness inspires. That very helplessness and gracious awkwardness of a child awakens our sympathy. There is, indeed, something about the young of all species that delights us in a manner that the older animals seldom achieve. What can be more delicious than a young lamb capering feebly about? Yet, save to the professional sheep-

painter, a mutton is an unlovely thing. A kid is delightful in its grace and spirit; a goat is almost a synonym for obstinacy and ugliness. And one fancies that if the animals, or some man from Mars, had anything to say about us they would find our great men mulish; our handsome women a trifle cowlike; but a child is alway lovely—to every species, to every being.

The problems involved in painting a child's portrait are very different from those which one faces in doing the portrait of a man or of a woman. While psychology in portraiture is in a rather embryonic state, still there is a certain effort in a man's portrait to state something of his character—what sort of man he is; to give, even, so far as may be in portraiture, some suggestion of his habits of life, even his profession, since one conceives that a soldier would look different from a clergyman, or a business man from a poet. And so it is in a woman's portrait: besides making her pretty, the serious painter may try to give an idea of what thoughts dominate her life.

Now with a child the matter is quite different. He has no fixed habits; such little thoughts as he indulges in are of a very simple nature. On the other hand, he is delightful, from his youth, his freshness and gaiety; he is

"Drunk with life's new wine."



DON BALTASAR CARLOS ON HORSEBACK

VELASQUEZ

PRADO, MADRID



MAIDS OF HONOR
VELASQUEZ
PRADO, MADRID

The problem, then, is to render this delicious joyousness, this flower-like freshness. For, indeed, one may say that a child is like a very young plant, and should be painted in such a way as to indicate its softness, tenderness, yet vital strength. One might say that a child should be painted like a flower, just as one might try to paint a fine old man like a lion or like a rock. One feels in an elder's portrait that the form is all important; that this must be rendered though all else fail. On the other hand, in a child's portrait one is willing to forgive some slight looseness or vagueness if the fragrance and sweetness of the little creature only be preserved. Indeed, it might be said that the painting of children partakes more of the nature of still life than does the portraiture of oldsters. Not that children are very still: indeed, as we all know, quite the opposite is true. But, just as in a good still life the painter strives particularly for qualities of texture, color, and surface bloom, even so, in the portrait of a child, these are the things that we desire, rather than any indication that the child is a prodigy. And one might go further than this and say that it is in just these matters that almost all great portraits of children, even the greatest, seem rather weak. Bronzino, with all his magnificent draftsmanship, makes his little eidolons as hard as steel; Velasquez's princesses, though well enveloped with

air, lack pulpiness. And so one might go down the list. With all their splendid qualities, Reynolds's children are bready, Madame Lebrun's are bloodless, Gainsborough's are scratchy.

How, then, would one enjoy a picture of a child which had something of the look, the texture and consistency of a well-painted peach! Some of the impressionists, notably Renoir, who painted flowers and fruit delightfully, also painted children with great charm. One of his portraits in Mr. Durand Ruel's house is almost as beautifully drawn as an Ingres, and at the same time has a charm of color, a sense of surface and of texture, that is quite unique.

Still, this is, no doubt, one of the things most lacking in many children's portraits—that fresh, dewy look which makes for our delight in them. The elder men, for the most part, painted by a certain receipt as far as color went, which included a number of browns. So it happened that generally those exquisite pearly tints which are among the loveliest colors in a child's face went wholly unrecorded. One should make an exception for Velasquez, who had an intuition for color which at times carried him out of and beyond his usual manner and practice.

In his portrait of the 'Infanta Margarita' one notes the tender pearly tints above the temples beautifully



INFANTA MARGARITA
VELASQUEZ
LOUVRE, PARIS



THE BLUE BOY

GAINSBOROUGH

DUKE OF WESTMINSTER COLLECTION, LONDON

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rendered. On the other hand, in 'Las Meninas,' where the same little princess appears, the tones of the face are more ashy—probably because, since the picture was at a much wider angle of vision, Velasquez felt disinclined to study any very small felicities of color.

As to the English painters, they quite often achieved handsome color; but very seldom, one might almost say never, did they make very true color. Gainsborough was happier and truer in this respect than the rest. His 'Mrs. Siddons' is one of the few English pictures of his time that shows an effort at rendering silvery *nuances.* But even Gainsborough, as a rule, made his pictures too warm in tone, so that the famous 'Blue Boy' is really a Green Boy. This defect was unfortunate enough in men's portraits and in women's, but even more so in the portraits of children, because the distinguishing mark in children's color, especially in blonde children of northern blood, is the pearly argentine quality about the brow and temples. The whole color-scheme has to be constructed to ring true with these silvery notes; and when, as in most English portraits, the color-scheme was already constructed on a golden Venetian basis the color of the child's face had to be sacrificed to "go" with the warm tones about it. So it happens that most of the Reynolds, Romney, Hoppner, children, even the most charming of them, are usually

yellow-faced little people, lacking the distinctive charm of the little ones of northern races.

Madame Vigée Lebrun, and most of the other French academic painters of that time, while their color was truer as far as the local tones went, did not know how to make the pulsating, palpitating look of live color which is particularly noticeable in children. This silvery tone, we have already noted, comes about from the extremely thin skin of northern children.

A color which in itself is of one hue will look quite different when seen through a translucent medium. And so it happens that red blood, which does not show at all through the thickest skin and looks greenish through yellow skin, looks almost blue through the delicate thin skin of a Teutonic child. This is how the expression "blue blood" came about; the "Sangre Azul" of the Spanish Visigoths was famous because their blood showed blue through their delicate blonde northern skin in contrast to the dark, dingy complexions about them.

One of the reasons why Renoir has been so successful in some of his portraits of children is from his impressionist method; for so, more than in any other way, can the pulsating look of life be rendered. One does not feel so much the lack of this palpitating, almost iridescent quality in a man's portrait, where character, after all, is the main thing; even in a woman's portrait



LOUIS, DAUPHIN OF FRANCE

LA TOUR

LOUVRE, PARIS



MADAME LOUISE OF FRANCE

NATTIER

PALACE OF VERSAILLES

one is willing to overlook it, if only the form be beautifully rendered; but in a child's portrait it is most essential, because it is the chief charm that a child has to show. For one does not expect great intellect or even character in children; they have their own character, to be sure, but it is of a much less complicated sort than that of a man. Nor does one expect subtle form; their forms are beautiful to us because we love them, but they are not so complicated, so difficult to trace, as those of their elders. But the color of the child is subtler, more exquisite, than in older people. It is, indeed, the child's chief charm, and if we are to make improvement in the painting of children it will be in the direction of more exquisite color that we shall develop.

Fragonard was the man of all the older men who was most successful in indicating this color-quality. He learned, in a dream, as it were, the secret of palpitating color, and the impressionists consider him one of their artistic forebears. In his 'Child with the Blond Hair' he has indicated the charm of fresh blond young flesh in a way that none of the other elder men ever dreamed of. He had everything, technically, that was needful,—skilled draftsmanship, charm of color, and sense of arrangement.

But, apart from all this, it may be that something of his success with children came from the fact that he

was a big child himself. Poor "Frago," as his friends called him, had all the simple-heartedness and guilelessness of a child. He understood their moods and feelings, and yet he was man enough to appreciate the humor and pathos of these tiny men and women. One feels him more in sympathy with children than any other painter. Velasquez, it is true, painted children with rare understanding, yet one sees his calm, rather superior smile as he swept his supple brush across the canvas. Reynolds, too, painted children with uncommon understanding, yet one fancies him peering at them like an old woman through his horn-rimmed glasses. But "Frago" was one of them—an older child—who knew just enough of the older world to see what was significant and humorous in their little underworld.

In none of his portraits of children is he more successful than in that of 'The Blond-Haired Child.' The little fellow is indicated with great skill. But it is not so much the technical ability—and Fragonard was a past master in technique—as it is the exquisite pearly color of the thing. It is well named 'The Blond Child,' for "Frago" was one of the first to "paint blond," as the French say.

Before his time, for the most part, painters had tried for that famous "golden glow" of which one reads so



CHILD WITH BLOND HAIR

FRAGONARD

WALLACE GALLERY, LONDON

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much in old-fashioned art-books. It is true that Velasquez, and, for that matter, Van Dyck, painted grayer than most of their contemporaries; yet to our modern eyes their work still seems rather yellow. But Fragonard, from a sort of instinct, painted "blond." Even his great academic picture, 'The High Priest Coresus,' painted while he was still a young man and under academic influence, is much more silvery in tone than are most of the pictures painted about him.

Not only in this picture, but in many others, has Fragonard celebrated the charm, the humor, and the pathos of childhood. There is one of these—not a portrait, by the way—representing 'The Schoolmistress' with her little flock about her. Before her stands whimpering a delightful little man, whose shirt, his only garment, would hardly serve as an advertisement for non-shrinkable soap. Not only in his paintings, but in his chalk-drawings and in his water-color sketches of children, was Fragonard supremely successful. There exsists a sketch of his daughter Rosalie *à deux crayons* which is not only masterly in its skilful and learned handling, but is also full of the freshness and charm of childhood. "Frago" loved flowers and children, and he painted them both with a lightness of touch, a dewy freshness, and an understanding of their particular charm that very few attain to.

Of course the term "portraits of children" is a rather broad one. For instance, we have very young children, as Lawrence's famous 'King of Rome.' There are children of five or six, such as the 'Infanta Margarita' or some of Bronzino's delightfully demure demoiselles. There are what one might call middle-aged children, as Goya's little 'Queen of Sicily'—only thirteen, yet already weighed down by regal dignity. And last, there are certain ones, such as the girl in Greuze's '*Cruche Cassée,*' who is not a child—the whole force of the allegory tells one that—and yet, as certainly, she is not "grown up." The puzzled face is still a child's face, though the body verges on maturity.

In a certain sense a young baby is easier to paint than a child of three or four. One looks at Bronzino's iron renderings of the little Medici children and wonders how he achieved such absolute detail, and especially such firmness of modeling. Many, possibly most, painters nowadays avail themselves of photography to help out the picture, and perhaps, considering their difficulties, they are almost justified. But Bronzino had no such aid. In some hidden way he achieved his absolute rendering. It may be, indeed, that the poor little princes, trained in the ways of courts, were able to keep still longer than the average child; and yet little Don Garcia laughs as gaily as possible as he clutches



DON GARCIA WITH A BIRD

BRONZINO

UFFIZI GALLERY, FLORENCE



THE BROKEN PITCHER

GREUZE

LOUVRE, PARIS

the poor frightened little bird with all a child's unconscious cruelty and *abandon.* One wonders whether Bronzino had some obscure idea of typifying the frightful cruelty of the Medici-Toledo strain by introducing this incident. The poor little child is innocent enough; though history records that this same Don Garcia, when a little older, was accused of killing his own brother.

Although Don Garcia apparently had life enough, it still remains probable that many little princes posed, as it were, in fear of their lives. The little Infanta Margarita stands as stiffly as possible among her Maids of Honor; indeed, what else could the poor little thing do in her stiff robes of cramoisie? Yet, even here, it is evident enough that there was difficulty in keeping her still, for one maid is on her knees, trying to amuse her mistress, while another bends over, whispering encouraging words to her; and the dwarfs and dogs were apparently brought in as diversions. Indeed, that is the motive of the picture. The little episode amused Velasquez, and he painted it just as it was. It is probably the smallest incident that ever inspired a great picture, and yet how great the picture is!—"The Theology of Painting," as "*Fa Presto,*" the brilliant Luca Giordano, called it. The blonde little Infanta probably never suspected that she was helping in the making of one of the great models of painting.

No one has been found to paint a portrait of a very young child, though certain of the elder painters, as Gerard David, have painted the little Jesus something as he may have looked when only a few weeks old. But to the cold, unbiased observer very young children are not beautiful. There is something embryonic about them; it seems as if they had not quite arrived at humanity. On the other hand, a child of a year or two, as one guesses the King of Rome (L'Aiglon) in Lawrence's picture to be, often is a delightful vision; although in this particular instance one suspects Sir Thomas of having made the child appear older than he really was, and also of having over-insisted on any likeness he may have had to the mighty Bonaparte.

When it comes to a portrait of a rather older child, as in the picture of Madame Vigee Lebrun and her daughter, the problem is somewhat simplified, though even here one can imagine an infinity of wriggling, and parental admonitions. Indeed, it may have been a succession of *mauvais quatres d'heure* for the poor child; as Madame Lebrun, despite the angelic countenance which she painted in her self-portraits, had the reputation of being something of a vixen. This same portrait, by the way, is admirably composed. It is a trifle formal—a little academic in its arrangement—but



MADAME VIGÉE LEBRUN AND DAUGHTER

VIGÉE LEBRUN

LOUVRE, PARIS

the lines are often beautiful, and, from an intricate design, a simple and satisfactory effect is produced.

We may be quite sure that the little 'Queen of Sicily' kept as still as a mouse while the gallant ex-bull-fighter, Goya, put her counterfeit presentment on canvas. She was probably frightened out of her wits by his truculent manner, but, besides this, no doubt the cares of state oppressed the little maid. However, very likely she had not long to pose; for Goya, when the fit was on him, could paint with immense rapidity, using anything that came handy—his fingers, or even a sponge. He sometimes painted an entire portrait in a day. This particular picture looks more carefully done, and it is, by the way, perhaps the best portrait Goya ever did. Certainly it has the most of charm; and to one who has only seen this picture certain other of Goya's careless creations give something of a shock.

Bronzino is interesting, among many other reasons, because he gives us an insight into what Michael Angelo might have done had he attempted portraiture. He was a pupil of Michael Angelo; and while in his treatment of the nude he never went to the excess of the great master, he had thoroughly learned from him the lesson of pure form. Indeed, in this matter of absolute form nothing compares with him till we come to the comparatively modern Frenchmen. As a matter of

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fact, Ingres is known to have been greatly interested in Bronzino's work, and a fine portrait by Ingres is not unlike a fine portrait by Bronzino. The elder painter's portraits of children are studied with the same severity as are his portraits of older persons; but "out of the strong cometh forth sweetness," and there is a charm in his portraits of children, grave or gay, that comes from the absolute justness of his observation.

The question of hardness versus softness in the treatment of children's portraits is an interesting one, and a hard one to solve. When one looks at a fine portrait by Reynolds or by Fragonard, where something of the melting softness of a child is expressed, one feels that this is the right way to do the thing. But, on the other hand, when one looks at one of Bronzino's nobly severe heads, or even at something by Madame Vigée Lebrun, one perceives that there is much to be said for the other side. For the Reynolds, after all, despite its melting sweetness, leaves out many of the forms—and many of the forms, too, that are most delicious in a child. The delicate modeling of a child's nose, the way in which the red transparent skin of the lower lip merges into the rest of the face, the impalpable eyebrows, hardly seen and yet so full of character—these things are hardly attempted by Reynolds, and yet



QUEEN OF SICILY

GOYA

COLLECTION OF COMTESSE DE PARIS

Bronzino has found a way to achieve them and still preserve remarkable simplicity.

Perhaps of all men Da Vinci best combined the sense of softness, of enveloping air, with that exactness of form that we always see and feel in nature. No child-portraits by him, as far as we know, exist; but there do exist children in his religious paintings, as well as drawings, which show how absolutely he could attain to form without losing his fine sense of the softness, the fragility, and the vitality of a child.

One likes to think of Rubens, handsome, prosperous, and happy, enlivening his leisure hours by painting his two handsome boys. The picture was a labor of love, done at his leisure, and so he was able to, and did, carry it farther than much of his work. It is, perhaps, the best of Rubens's portraits—at least, the most carefully studied; and because he knew the children, had seen them grow up under his eyes, the character is better understood than in much of his work. For it must be confessed that Rubens, so great in many things, was not at his best in portraiture. His men, his women, too, all look prosperous, cheerful, healthy, but they also all look the same; they are all of one family. He built his heads from a florid formula, rather than by coldly observing, as did Velasquez, the characteristic shape, the

personal color, of each individual. But this portrait of his children is an exception; one feels their character is well indicated.

Van Dyck, immensely skilful in everything, was no less so in his portraits of children than elsewhere. Indeed, his portraits of children have this advantage: that while he thought it necessary, in his presentments of men and women, to flatter them not a little, and, therefore, to change the character and weaken the form, in his pictures of children he was under no such fancied obligation. He painted them much as he thought they looked. The portrait of the 'Children of Charles I.' shows more character in the heads than one often observes in his pictures of older people; and in the 'Prince of Orange with Princess Marie,' the faces, while distinguished, are hardly what one would call pretty. It is evident that Van Dyck, in this instance, strove to paint them as they were. Yet, with all his skill, he missed something of the child charm which men so different as Bronzino, Velasquez, and Greuze attained.

Although Holbein apparently seldom painted children, yet the few examples he has produced of this sort remain remarkable performances. His portrait of his wife and children is one of the best things he ever did. It has not the affected archaism of pose and modeling



HOLBEIN'S WIFE AND CHILDREN

HOLBEIN

BASLE MUSEUM

that was forced on him by the predilections of the English court; rather, it is observed with great sincerity and justness, and the result is quite remarkable. The children are certainly not what one would call pretty; but in a collection such as this, where many of the portraits are of an almost cloying sweetness, it is something of a relief to come on these honest Tudesque faces. If Greuze made his children too pretty, Holbein doubtless made his too ugly. Still, his sincerity is edifying. This picture, it is said, had a great effect on the art of Wilhelm Leibl, who was perhaps the strongest painter of modern Germany.

Nattier has a charm that is difficult to analyze. Not that he is very subtle, but his pictures are so pretty, so *mièvre*, that one feels they should be considered meretricious, and yet, for all that, a very distinct charm exhales from these delicate, anæmic faces of the little French Princesses, so *raffinées*, so young ladylike, so like intensely cultivated flowers. How charming is this little Madame Louise of France! At first sight, a young lady, so prim is she, so anxious to be *comme il faut*. Yet when one looks well at the face it is the face of a little girl; but a little girl most anxious to be *sage*, to rightly do her little part in the court of the mighty and pleasant land of France. There is a pathos in the picture, whether perceived by Nattier or not—in this little child of eleven,

who, in our country, would be climbing trees, but here is bound down in her stiff court dress to *les convenances.*

Greuze, again, was above all things a painter of children. It is in his children's heads that he is indeed successful, for the softness, that was in much of his work a defect, was suited to the rounded, immature forms of children. Nothing could be prettier—more "cunning," as the women of our day delight to say—than his portrait of the little Countess Mollien guarding her armful of puppies with all a child's pathetic insistence. It is interesting to compare the technique of Greuze with that of Reynolds and others of the English school. Though Greuze is just as soft and melting as they, his manner of drawing, of painting, an eye or a mouth is at the same time more academic and truer to nature than is theirs; in short, it is better observed. Indeed, Greuze, while rather over-rated in his day, is now underrated. His great defect was, at the same time, one of his qualities: that he made things soft and pretty. But he was a very able technician, and, more than most men, he had a sense of the charm of childhood.

Gainsborough, though first and foremost a painter of woman, could paint a delightful portrait of a child. The 'Blue Boy' is one of the most famous portraits in the world—largely through the well-known story of

how Gainsborough painted it to disprove Sir Joshua's dictum that blue did not look well in the middle of a picture. The curious thing about his effort, as has often enough been pointed out, is that the boy is really dressed in green rather than blue; that is, the blue is so bathed in that famous golden glow that writers of his time speak of that the hue is subtly changed to green. Gainsborough also painted a 'Pink Boy,' but he, though he is pretty, has never been regarded as so successful as his more famous blue brother.

Sir Joshua Reynolds himself considered the 'Strawberry Girl' to be one of his finest performances. It was, he said, "one of the half-dozen original things which no man ever exceeded in his life's work." And so it is, indeed, charming and interesting, but one is at a loss to know why Sir Joshua should have regarded it as particularly original. It is, let us say, personal rather than original. It has various of Reynolds's ear-marks which appear often enough in others of his works; for instance, the wide-open, mouselike eyes were features which he delighted in. Indeed, he painted a picture, which he called 'Muscipula,' of a little girl holding a mouse. In this he tried to bring out a real or fancied resemblance between the little girl and the mouse. In this 'Strawberry Girl,' which is pretty enough in the main, one notes, besides the enormous eyes, a curious length in

the nose and a corresponding shortness from the mouth to the chin. The face can hardly be called beautiful, and yet it has something of the *allure* that Sir Joshua's best efforts possess.

Whistler's portraits of children are among his most successful performances. His portrait of 'Miss Alexander,' which represents a child of ten or twelve, was, at the time of its first exhibition, supposed to be very much in the manner of Velasquez. Superficially, it may be so. The arrangement is a combination of qualities learned from Velasquez and from the Japanese. But the two finest things in it, the design and the color, are quite Whistler's own. Whistler's color may have been inspired by Velasquez, but it became distinctly a different thing. There is in it, especially as illustrated in this portrait, a certain gray tonality which Velasquez never had. Probably he never tried for it, as his pictures are much warmer in tone. On the other hand, his perception of purplish or grayish *nuances* of color, as in the portrait of Philip IV., London, is more delicate than the American's.

Still, this portrait of Whistler's is quite the best thing he ever made; and as an illustration of the English child of the eighties it will also always have its historic value, although in this regard it was much criticized at the time of its appearance. It was considered smoky



PORTRAIT OF MISS ALEXANDER

WHISTLER

PROPERTY OF W. C. ALEXANDER

and dirty in color, and the face was thought cross and ugly. Like almost all criticism, these strictures had a certain basis of fact. The color is a trifle blackish; the child, while not ugly, is certainly not exactly pretty. But the picture has distinction and charm, and, for Whistler, it was very well made. One feels that Alice in Wonderland may have looked something like this: indeed, Tenniel's illustrations to Lewis Carroll's delightful work represent Alice in much the same costume. How strange and *farouche* this little English maid seems, surrounded, as she is here, by prim princesses of foreign lands!

Another picture which betrays in quite a different way the influence of Velasquez is Manet's 'Boy with the Sword.' Curiously enough, neither Manet nor Whistler were ever in Spain; that is, Whistler never was, and Manet spent only a few weeks there, long after he had painted his 'Boy with the Sword.' But it is not hard to get a very good idea of Velasquez in London's National Gallery; and while the Louvre is not so full of fine examples of the Spaniard, it is known that Manet copied one Velasquez painting there, and doubtless knew the rest by heart. Although this picture was painted quite early in Manet's artistic life, and although it has no signs of the pure color of his later days, it is still very characteristic of his style: for instance, the face, painted

so flat and without modeling; the eyes, each made in with a touch or two; and the coat, again, painted in almost flat tones of the famous "Manet black."

It is a curious thing that so little a matter as the manner in which a painter lays on the paint should decide whether or no he shall be a painter of children. Yet this thing is, in a measure, true. For instance, in the work of Franz Hals we find little or no painting of children; certainly nothing that is remarkably interesting. Now Hals had a direct, sharp, crisp stroke that was admirable for expressing the well-marked planes on the faces of middle-aged people; but when it came to painting children it was not so happy. For in a child's head the planes all melt one into the other, so that the most successful painters of children are either men like Velasquez and Fragonard, or the modern Carrière, whose manner is loose and flowing, expressing much of what the Italians called *morbidezza;* or else it is the rather formal classicist, as Madame Lebrun or Bronzino, who is successful. His or her precise, rather "licked" manner serves to preserve the forms precisely, indeed, yet with the gradations from one plane to another carefully observed. It is curious that so physical a matter should affect the painting of children; but, after all, Hals's direct, rather *brutale* touch argued a lack of sensitiveness to delicate *nuances*, and children are all



BOY WITH A SWORD

MANET

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK

suggestion and the beginning of things, all cloud and air.

Many modern portrait-painters make this mistake of painting all sorts of heads in the same technique. Most of them have a way of putting in the "planes" of the head in broad brush-strokes, and as far as the handling goes are apt to paint a child's head with much the same *facture* as the head of a man. They do not stop to consider that the character of each head can best be expressed by a particular style of workmanship. For instance, the almost scratchy, stringy technique which would do very well in rendering an old head would not do at all in suggesting the head of a middle-aged man. And in the same way, the "square touch" which did well enough in painting a man would not succeed so well in portraying a child.

Velasquez understood this particularly well. One might almost say that each one of his portrait heads is painted differently. At least his old men are very different from his men of the middle years, and he really invented a technique for the rendering of children that, in its sweeping softness, preserves something of the roundness and tenderness of a child's form. Velasquez's work is a little misleading in some respects: his touch is so loose and soft, almost a smear, that one does not realize, till after careful study, how subtly and delicately

the most impalpable forms are indicated, or, at least, suggested. He had great sympathy for and interest in children, but one feels this sympathy was something like the feeling one has for a beautiful fresh blossom, something rather impersonal. It is the beauty of the blossom one cares for; one is not interested in that particular blossom's individuality. And so with Velasquez one feels that he was interested in the delicious aspect of the little Hapsburg Infanta, but one doubts if he tried to analyze her immature mind. In this no doubt he was right, for who can read the face?

We sometimes feel that many portraits of children are over-formal in pose, yet it should be remembered that the unfortunate painter, by the conditions of his craft, is only able to choose one out of a thousand movements. We see a child at play: at every moment it takes some divinely graceful and infantile pose. We feel now is the moment—or now—or, again, just now. Yes, but which of the various moments is the one to choose? This question of gesture comes into the painting of women's portraits, too, and of men's as well. One desires a subtle something in the set of the head, in the movement of the hands, that shall give it the look of life, and, too, differentiate it from the portraits of other people. In portraits of men a supreme example of success in this



RUBENS'S SONS

RUBENS

LIECHTENSTEIN GALLERY, VIENNA

effort is Ingres's portrait of Monsieur Bertin. The fine old man seems just ready to spring from his chair, and yet he is immobile: there is repose to the picture as well as life. This is the ideal. Yet in many portraits, in many fine portraits, too, notably among the Venetians, the pose is perfectly commonplace—agreeable enough, but without betraying any search for originality or individuality.

In a child's portrait naturally the same difficulty arises, only it is increased a hundred-fold. An older person comes to have a dozen or so of gestures which are characteristic and suggestive of just that particular man or woman. It remains, then, to select that gesture which is at the same time the most individual and the most graceful. But a child is, as it were, experimenting with gesture: each minute he tries a new one, each one more graceful than the last, till the distracted painter falls back on a pose of comparative commonplaceness.

But there is more than this to the matter. Let us suppose the painter does paint his child laughing, or running after its hoop, or in some other marked movement. Well, one wearies at the end of seeing a person perpetually smiling, never doing anything but smile. In the same way, too, one wearies of seeing the child perpetually balance upon one toe. This suggestion of

life, of movement, can be accomplished—it has been done—but it adds immensely to the difficulty of the problem.

The truth is that what we really desire is the look, not of a moving figure, but of one just about to move. The Greeks understood this, and one of the things that makes for the aspect of life in their statues is this look of being just about to move. Their figures are seldom in strong action. On the other hand, they seem always just about to move. One way in which they accomplished this was by always making their statues just a trifle off the balance, so that many of their figures have to be held up by a sculptured stump of a tree at the side of the leg. This lack of absolute balance gives a sense of life. One feels that the figure must move in a moment in order not to fall. Moreover, the very lack of balance suggests interior life, as one often holds one's self in some unbalanced position by a sort of fly-like attraction of the foot to the ground.

Certain child-portraits have something of this movement, potential rather than exerted. For instance, Fragonard's 'Child with the Blond Hair' seems not quite smiling indeed, but surely just about to smile. When one comes to think of it, this is the charm of many a fine portrait. The 'Mona Lisa' is really not



WILLIAM II. OF NASSAU

VAN DYCK

HERMITAGE GALLERY, ST. PETERSBURG



PORTRAIT OF COUNTESS MOLLIEN

GREUZE

PRIVATE COLLECTION

quite smiling: rather, she has just been smiling; she is just about to smile again.

This quality of life, of, at least, potential vitality, while important in all portraits, seems particularly important in the portraits of children. For in portraits of men and women, old people especially, repose is not amiss. Some of them sit like

"Gray-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone;"

and if their portrait has a certain immobility it is well. But a child is a bundle of nerves, never still a moment; and though, by the conditions of his art, a portrait-painter is forced to paint him immobile, he strives to suggest potential movement as much as may be.

Speaking broadly, one might say that those artists who have painted women well have also painted children well. One thinks of Gainsborough or of Madame Vigée Lebrun in this connection. Yet this rule does not always hold; for David, who was quite masterly in his woman-portraits, often painted children as if they were little men. One notes this in the portrait of Michel Gérard and his children. On the other hand, Sir Joshua Reynolds seems to have painted children more delightfully than he did women. And while Velasquez painted women, as he did everything, well,

still, in his portraits of children he is most happy. The 'Infanta Margarita,' the same child in 'Las Meninas,' and the 'Infanta Rose' are among the great child-portraits of the world.

A curious reaction is seen in the way in which the costumes of children in famous portraits affect the modern costume of children. As a child cannot control its own costume, it is easier to try experiments on the luckless little being. For instance, not so long ago, perhaps twenty years ago, what were barbarously called "bangs" came very much into favor for children. The idea was taken, one must believe, from the famous portrait of the 'Children of Charles the First,' by Sir Antony Van Dyck. Again, certain very fetching little knots of pink ribbon fastening blonde hair one recognizes as taken from Velasquez's famous 'Infanta Margarita.' The costumes of Velasquez's Infantas have been much criticized as hopelessly ugly. Of course they are rather stiff, but they have a certain beauty of their own. For instance, the chief charm of Velasquez's 'Infanta Rose' comes from the costume, which is a gorgeous affair of red shot with silver; the red is reinforced with touches, in knots, or *choux*, of a stronger red placed here and there to heighten the effect. Again, the very stiffness of the dress adds to the charming helplessness,



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

DONATELLO

NATIONAL MUSEUM, FLORENCE

the flower-like look of the hands, and intensifies the delicate oval of the face.

The cult of the child did not exist in the olden days, as it does now. Nobody cared very much what the child thought or did, provided it stayed safe and sound. There were no Stanley Halls in those times, to take down the first hundred words a child learned to say, and to philosophize upon them. A child was a child to these oldsters, and that was all. This made their portraits more objective, and probably that was a good thing. At the same time, they were not disposed to regard a child as so intricate an organism as we do now, and this may explain, too, why there were so few portraits of children long ago. People did not realize then, as they do now, how important the child was; that the "child is father of the man." With them a child developed as a plant. Perhaps they were not altogether wrong in their point of view. With them there was no digging up of seeds to see if they would grow. They nourished the young plant and allowed it to develop, and trusted that heaven would give the increase. This is somewhat beside the mark. The point is that children were in those days not at all regarded as psychological problems; and though Bronzino and Da Vinci achieved some renderings of children, as well as of

elders, that are studied further than anything that is done nowadays, it came about from their resolute and exact study of detail, rather than from any interest in child-psychology.

Perhaps if, in the future, some portrait of a child is made, better even than the old ones, its virtue will come about from some mixture of the old qualities with a more sensitive feeling of color; of the pulsating life in a child's face; and, too, a more sympathetic, a more subtle sense of the little thing's moods; of its immature gesture and its individual character—half developed, indeed, but already its own.

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